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STRATEGIC HOMEPORTING:

NATIONAL STRATEGY OR BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS?

Captain Billy L. Lewis, USN

"I will start by saying that strategic homeporting is an essential element of our national military strategy. Strategic homeporting, within the context of our national military strategy, is designed to help us retain the strategic initiative so that we have the benefits of defense without the costs of war."

Captain Thomas Daly, USN

"The Navy's intentions have more to do with spreading its influence than dispersing its fleet. The Navy, under the current Administration, has been particularly interested in currying political favor as it presses ahead with its ambitious plan for a 600 ship Navy."

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In 1982, the Navy initiated a plan to revamp the basing of ships homeported in the United States. This plan, which became known as the strategic homeporting program, was intended to accommodate the anticipated growth of the fleet to 600 ships and prevent overloading of existing homeports. The plan adjusted the ship mix at existing homeports and proposed the development of new homeports to correct strategic shortfalls in the existing homeport structure. The plan was based on five strategic principles - force dispersal to complicate Soviet targeting, battlegroup integrity, wider industrial base utilization, logistics suitability and geographic considerations such as reduced transit times to likely operating areas.

By 1985, strategic homeporting was moving forward with building momentum. The Navy had identified the desired geographic areas for the new homeports and had initiated a competitive site selection process. Cities desiring to be a homeport were asked to submit proposals, including offsets and incentives. Proposals were evaluated according to a selection criteria which included cost, land, industrial support, environmental impact and, as will be discussed later, community support.¹

Using this process, 13 homeports were identified, including 4 existing homeports. The plan included (1) a battleship surface

Hearings on H.R. 4181, House Committee on Armed Services Military Installations and Facilities Subcommittee, HASC No. 99-42, Feb 28 and Mar 4-7, 12 and 13, 1986, p.269.

action group at Staten Island, New York; (2) a battleship surface action group at Ingleside, Texas and Galveston, Texas; (3) a carrier battlegroup at Everett, Washington; (4) a battleship surface action group at San Francisco, California; Long Beach, California; and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; (5) a carrier battlegroup at Pensacola, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; and Pascagoula, Mississippi; and (6) miscellaneous support ships at Key West, Florida; Lake Charles, Louisiana, and Gulfport, Mississippi. In total, the program comprised 63 surface ships for the 2 carrier groups, the 3 battleship groups, the Naval Reserve Force, and support force.² The Navy's FY-87 Budget Submission included this strategic homeporting program.

In the course of deliberations on the Navy's \$799 million budget request for strategic homeporting, the House Military Installations and Facilities Subcommittee solicited the testimonies of Captain Daly, the Director of the Navy's Strategic Concepts Group, and Admiral Carroll, the Director of the Center for Defense Information, a private research firm.³ The stark difference in their testimonies (excerpts shown earlier) as to the motivation of then-Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman, the architect of the strategic homeporting concept, is the focus of this paper. Was strategic homeporting the result of Lehman's strategic vision or was it a political ploy? Using Graham Allison's paradigm of

²Navy Homeports, Report to Congressional Requesters, United States General Accounting Office, GAO/NSIAD-91-158, 1991, p. 8.

³Hearings on H.R. 4181, pp.254 and 142.

bureaucratic politics, this paper will attempt to show that Admiral Carroll was correct - that Secretary Lehman devised strategic homeporting to win support for his proposal to build a 600 ship Navy.

The basic unit of analysis of Allison's paradigm assumes that government action is not the solution to a problem, but rather is a political resultant: action characterized by compromise and conflict among government players of unequal influence who bargain throughout regularized channels.¹ Lehman's dilemma was how to achieve a 600 ship Navy as a political resultant. The 600 ship Navy had been proposed originally as the level required to support the Navy's Maritime Strategy, a strategy for countering the Soviet naval threat. But winning support based on the Soviet threat would focus attention on the strategy and would be subject to the vagaries of intelligence estimates, warning time, likely courses of action by the enemy, etc. - subjective units of analysis on which widely varying expert opinion could be found. Bargaining on this basis was likely to focus on the number of ships required to counter the threat, and Lehman was convinced that 600 was the right number. The question then was how best to bring the political dynamic into the discussion, allowing for bargaining and compromise, without endangering the size fleet he desired.

The strategic homeporting proposal was the answer to the

¹Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision, Harper Collins Publishers, 1971, p. 162.

question. The strategic homeporting competitive selection process created a situation in which cities were anxious, for economic reasons, to "win" Navy ships. Congressmen were equally, if not more anxious to support their constituents' efforts. In the words of Representative Ortiz of Texas, "I am trying to get homeports for my state, in my city which is Corpus Christi. In my case, we tried to lure the Navy to come in...the city passed a bond issue of \$25 million and the state matched that."⁵ Attention, at least the attention of a Congressman whose district or state contained prospective homeports, came to be focused not on the total number of ships in the fleet as a whole, but rather on the number of ships to be homeported in his district/state. In fact, the homeport numbers were small, but the total was 600.

Similarly, strategic homeporting facilitated the bargaining and compromise inherent in a political resultant. As an example, Senators Moynihan and D'Amato of New York appeared before the Installations and Facilities Subcommittee to express their support for strategic homeporting, one of the candidates being Staten Island. In questioning Senator Moynihan, Representative Hutto of Florida asked, "How about Pensacola, Florida?", to which the Senator responded, "Yes, you ought to." And later, "So, I am supportive, not only of homeporting of New York, but, yes, Everett, Washington, and Pensacola, and the other areas that have been outlined."⁶ Wagons clearly were being circled.

⁵Hearings on H.R. 4181, p. 8.

⁶Ibid., pp. 77-78.

In June 1986, while budget deliberations were in full swing, the General Accounting Office published a report which questioned the Navy's justification for the strategic homeporting program. Additionally, the report stated that the Navy had seriously underestimated the cost of the program, and concluded that it was possible both to accommodate 600 ships in existing homeports and to do so less expensively than with new homeports.¹ Nevertheless, Congress enacted Public Law 99-591 in 1986 granting the appropriation and obligation of up to \$799 million for military construction for strategic homeporting through fiscal year 1991. Why did Congress apparently ignore GAO's conclusions? The answers to the four questions constituting the organizing characteristics of Allison's paradigm of bureaucratic politics provide the answer to this question as well.

What was the game and who were the players? The game, of course, was the budget process, played in the central arena of the Defense budget authorization and appropriation process. The action-channels through which the bargaining games of the budget process would be played were the successive steps of Defense Department budget formulation, Presidential budget submission to Congress, Congressional review of the President's budget and the complex process of finalizing House and Senate Authorization and Appropriation bills. Those channels, according to the paradigm, dictated that the players, once the budget was submitted, would be

Navy Ships: Information on the Benefits and Costs of Establishing New Homeports, NSIAD-86-146, June, 1986, p. 3.

the Congress. (Technically, the early stages of the game had included DoD players, most notably in the Defense Resources Board deliberations through which the DoD budget estimates were negotiated; however, it is the political resultant of Congressional deliberations on strategic homeporting which is of interest here.) Accordingly, advantage in the play of the game would fall to those members of Congress filling positions in the key Defense authorization and appropriation committees and subcommittees.

What would determine the players' impact on the results of the game? In general, a player's influence, both formal and informal, within Congress defined his potential impact on the decision to fund strategic homeporting, but real power in the budget game is vested in those members holding key budget committee positions. A review of the states in which strategic homeports were to be located and the positions held by Congressmen representing those states suggests that Secretary Lehman understood very clearly where power resides in the budget process. California, Texas, Washington, New York, Mississippi and Alabama not only enjoy wide representation, but long standing influential representation as well. Six members of the House Military Installations and Facilities Subcommittee were from a strategic homeport state, for instance. Five members, including the Chairman, of the House Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee represented strategic homeport states. The result, of course, was not only that key players held critical agenda-setting and voting positions in the budget process, but also that many powerful

members of the House and Senate had a vested interest in seeing strategic homeporting funded. In the dynamics of quid pro quo bargain and compromise that are the essence of Congressional game play, the implications extended well beyond the scope of strategic homeporting - a point which no doubt was not lost on all players, regardless of home state. Representative Dellums, the Chairman of the Installations and Facilities Subcommittee, expressed grudging recognition of how effectively Secretary Lehman was playing the bureaucratic political game when he observed that, "The question that begs asking, if there was no list that establishes a clearly thought out formula, it raises the political nature of these decisions. Because I notice my colleagues going hammer and [tongue] at each other over who gets homeporting...I mean, I understand the issue, but when the military places themselves in this kind of situation, it is almost campaigning for office."¹

The final element contributing to approval of strategic homeporting funding despite the GAO's recommendations lies in the answer to Allison's last paradigm-defining question - What determines each players stand? Clearly, a player's stand was defined by his perception of what made sense in terms of his political well-being. For those players representing homeport states, strategic homeporting approval meant votes from those constituents who were vitally interested in "winning" a homeport. It is difficult to imagine those Congressmen not having made a commitment to their constituents to support their effort. For

¹Hearings on H.R. 4181, p. 14.

those players not representing strategic homeport states, voting for approval of funding not only avoided lining up against a broad and influential consensus, but also represented at least the possibility of gaining a bargaining chip which might prove useful in the future. In fact, the only significant concern over strategic homeporting expressed by key players came from those whose stand was defined by potential loss; namely, those Representatives from districts with existing homeports. Representative Bates of California, for instance, stated that before approval of the plan, the Navy should be required to pledge that strategic homeporting would not diminish fleet levels in existing homeports.⁹ The Navy obviously successfully assuaged these concerns.

It is an interesting footnote to the bureaucratic politics of strategic homeporting that the program outlived the 600 ship Navy it was intended to support. The fleet actually peaked at 570 ships in 1987, and under increasing budgetary pressure and the decline of the Soviet threat, the 1995 projection is a fleet composed of about 450 ships with only 12 carriers. Nevertheless, \$640 million have been obligated to date for strategic homeports, and work continues toward completion of five of the original nine homeports.¹⁰ It is safe to assume that it is only the political sunk costs of Congress that have kept strategic homeporting afloat.

⁹Hearings on H.R.4181, p. 83.

¹⁰GAO/NSIAD-91-158, pp. 3-9.